

# TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

## Top Issues for the 79th Texas Legislature

*The Board's highest priority is helping Texas achieve the goals of Closing the Gaps by 2015, the state's higher education plan. In that context, the following are the top issues for the Board as the 79th Legislature convenes. While some attempt has been made to put these issues in order of relative concern, they are all important and are issues on which the Board is focusing simultaneously and continuously.*

### Accountability and Performance System

An accountability and performance system is required by an executive order from the Governor and is the subject of a charge to the Joint Interim Committee on Higher Education. The Board will work with state leadership to refine this system, to be in place by December 17, 2004, for use in developing state policy on higher education and in monitoring progress toward the goals of *Closing the Gaps by 2015*.

### Financial Aid

The Board supports the recommendations of its August 2004 report, *Preparing for the Emerging Texas*, to streamline and enhance financial aid programs. In particular, the Board emphasizes financial aid funding levels recommended in its 2006-2007 Legislative Appropriation Request:

- Raise total funding for two programs, TEXAS Grant and Texas B-On-Time Loan Program, from \$324 million to \$646 million for the biennium.
- Increase funding for Texas College Work-Study from \$4.7 million to \$14.7 million to serve approximately 11,000 more students each year of the biennium.
- Increase funding for TEXAS Grant II from \$4.5 million to \$14.5 million per year to support approximately 18,000 more students seeking associate degrees at two-year institutions.

### Excellence

Students at each public higher education institution in the state must receive an excellent undergraduate education. Excellent undergraduate programs are the foundation of excellent graduate-level programs, and the Board will focus on ensuring that high-quality undergraduate and graduate programs are developed, maintained, or expanded based on an institution's capabilities and regional/state needs and interests. In this regard, the Board will assist in defining "Tier 1" in a

way that makes sense for Texas, given its limited resources, and that strikes a better balance between teaching and research. The Board also will advise policy makers on improving planning and coordination, increasing the level of cooperation, and reducing the amount of competition across systems and among campuses.

## **Time-To-Degree**

Encouraging students to complete their degrees more quickly will allow Texas higher education institutions to serve more students in the same amount of time, thereby helping the state accommodate more students with limited resources on the way to achieving the *Closing the Gaps* participation goal of enrolling 1.5 million students by 2015. Incentives to encourage students to take greater course loads and incentives to encourage institutions to structure offerings in ways that students can take the classes they need will be vital.

## **Research**

The Board will contribute its expertise toward helping state leaders define and develop research and/or “Tier 1” institutions effectively and efficiently for Texas. Also, the Board’s 2006-2007 Legislative Appropriations Request emphasizes the need for additional funding for state research grant programs:

- Advanced Technology Program – Increase funding levels for the first time since 1987 from \$19.4 million to \$40.6 million per biennium to support technology research
- Advanced Research Program – Restore funds to \$30 million per biennium to support basic research.

## **Higher Education Funding**

While acknowledging state government’s limited financial resources, the Board recommends increased funding for higher education where feasible. In that regard, all exceptional items requested in the Board’s 2006-2007 Legislative Appropriations Request would restore current funding levels for funds trustee to the Coordinating Board and for other types of funding to institutions. In particular:

- Dramatic enrollment growth funding at institutions of higher education. With the large and rapid enrollment growth expected as the state to meets *Closing the Gaps* goals over the next 10 years, appropriate funding is critical.
- Health profession-related education:
  - Nursing enrollment growth (\$11.8 million per year requested in specifically designated fund for nursing growth)
  - Family practice residency program (\$1.3 million per year needed to restore to 2003 level of \$10 million)

- Graduate medical education (\$6.1 million more per year needed; funded at \$7.2 million in 2003, but at only \$1.9 million in 2004-2005)

## **P-16 Initiatives**

Through its work with the P-12 education sector, the Board continues to encourage effective methods for developing interest in higher education among public school students and their parents, which in turn encourages them to prepare academically and financially for college. Examples of recent legislative action that support the Board in these efforts include:

- Authorizing and funding a motivational and awareness campaign (*College for Texans* Campaign)
- Adopting the Texas Academic Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) assessment, with a college-readiness component
- Creating the P-16 Council, and
- Requiring partnerships between low-performing high schools and institutions of higher education.

## **Community Colleges**

An estimated 80 percent of the 500,000 additional students needed to meet the *Closing the Gaps by 2015* participation goal will enter higher education at community colleges. These institutions must be funded at levels that ensure that they continue to offer broad access to high-quality educational programs. While Texas' transfer initiatives are among the best in the nation, we must continue to improve articulation agreements and the transfer process to increase the number of two-year college students who successfully transfer to universities and complete a bachelor's degree.

## **Developmental Education**

The *Closing the Gaps by 2015* success goal calls for ensuring that more students persist in higher education and earn certificates and degrees at higher education institutions. The Texas Success Initiative adopted by the 78th Legislature gives institutions the flexibility to respond more creatively and effectively in efforts to develop the academic skills of under-prepared college students. The Board will continue to support this program and improve developmental education programs.

## **Top 10 Percent Law**

While the Board may not adopt a recommendation regarding proposed changes to the top 10 percent law, it stands ready to help state leaders weigh the impact of various alternatives.